



AUGUSTA BUDGETWATCH INITIATIVE (2013-2015)

PROJECT YEAR: 2013-2015

CUSTOMER DEPARTMENT(S): Government-wide, but executed by IT

PROJECT COST: \$0 (in-house Information Technology-development project)

CUSTOMER NEED:

Augusta, Georgia is a government with a 2014 budget of \$690,542,830 from all funds, which includes the General Fund, Special Revenue Funds, Capital Project Funds, Debt Service Funds, Enterprise Funds, Internal Service Funds, and Trust & Agency Funds. Naturally, with this level of funding involved in supplying services to the public, there is a great amount of accountability required of government officials and employees.

The true customers of the BudgetWatch Initiative (BWi) are the citizens of Augusta, Georgia. More specifically, the *taxpayers* of Augusta can be said to be the true customers and beneficiaries of the initiative. It is the taxes paid by the citizens that serve as the funding source for the government, so transparency is the least that they deserve. Even though Augusta goes through annual audits to validate financial management practices, fiscal transparency available to citizens at their command is a gesture of good faith and good will that the city must exercise.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The goals of the BWI are as follows:

- Create a single “one stop shop” page on the city web site at <http://www.augustaga.gov> called “Your Money” which provides citizens with a launch point to which they can go see other pages that are related to how Augusta utilizes its revenues.
- Reduce the need for time-consuming Georgia Open Records Act (ORA) Request responses. The number of requests vary widely depending on the issues that are before the Augusta Commission for consideration at any given time, but government employees often have to stop their routine, day-to-day activities to response to the ORA requests because there is a time constraint involved.
- Provide true fiscal transparency.

A caveat with this initiative is that not every single request received from citizens, the media, etc. will be able to be automated. The goals of the project involve satisfying most of the requests that the government receives by providing data to the requestors in a manner that they find acceptable for their own analysis.

The major action items of the BWI are as follows:

- Create a single “one stop shop” page on the city web site at <http://www.augustaga.gov> called “Your Money”. The “Your Money” page is a compilation of other pages, so this task item involves the association and perhaps consolidation of pages that are related to budget. **COMPLETED IN 2013 at <http://www.augustaga.gov/1745/Your-Money>**
- Develop a simple budget dashboard as part of the city’s overall performance dashboard, with the intent to provide citizens with easy-to-understand charts and graphs about where spending is planned. **COMPLETED IN 2013 at <http://dashboard.augustaga.gov/?guestuser=guestuser&dashID=99>**
- Develop budget videos that use graphics and voice-overs to explain various budget concepts to the viewers. Typically, budget is explained only during the budgeting process, so a set of videos that are prepared for viewing anytime over any device (desktop, mobile, tablet, etc.) will help illustrate how the budgeting process works. **AUGUST 2014 – IN PLANNING PHASE. EXPECTED DEPLOYMENT FALL 2014**

The planned budget videos are as follows:

- Government Revenue Sources
- Capital and Operating Budgets Explained
- Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) explained
- Millage Rates Explained
- Major Expense Categories
- Pieces of the Budget Pie (explanation of how the budget “pie” is divided among various funds). This video would illustrate that XX cents of every dollar go to school board, and YY cents goes to the general fund, and so on.
- What is a Tax Digest and what does it mean for property values and taxes?
- How is Property Tax Determined?
- Create a Fiscal Transparency search page that is suitable for desktop or mobile, with the intended purpose to provide the viewer with the capability to look at city revenues and expenses in “near-real-time” (for security purposes) so that the data isn’t limited to a monthly PDF report posted to the web site. Ideally, this page would permit citizens with the ability to see what city revenue and expenses were as of the close of business of the previous day for various budget categories. For example, the page would permit a citizen to see how much the city had spent for electricity out of the general fund over a certain time period. **AUGUST 2014 – IN PLANNING PHASE. EXPECTED DEPLOYMENT 1ST QUARTER 2015**
- Update capital projects (especially SPLOST, but also other funds) with a geographic component such as an address so that ESRI ArcGIS can be used to show *where* the project is taking place, as well as identifying the population or district that is benefiting from the project.
- Develop searchable, interactive web pages tied in with Augusta’s SPLOST projects so that officials and citizens can see what projects were funded by SPLOST, when/if they were completed, and *where* the activities took place. The goal of this specific action item is to demonstrate to the citizens the truth of the phrase “Your 1-cent Sales Tax at Work”.

- Develop searchable, interactive web pages tied in with Augusta's Transportation Investment Act of 2010 (TIA) projects, which include a variety of road widening, sidewalk improvements, traffic signal, and bridge modernization projects that are funded by an additional one-cent sales tax. The purpose of these pages is to satisfy the needs of officials and citizens to see the status and progress of TIA-funded projects in Augusta and Richmond County. The TIA is actually a State of Georgia initiative, but the funds for the projects come from local spending (similar to SPLOST) and the Augusta Engineering Department has management responsibility for implementing the TIA projects. **AUGUST 2014 – UNDER DEPARTMENTAL REVIEW.**

CONCLUSION:

This project is a work-in-progress, but it is moving Augusta towards true transparency. The final pieces of the fiscal transparency puzzle will be put in place in the 4th quarter of 2014 and the first two quarters of 2015. The final steps cannot be taken until the city's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software (Sungard IFAS) is upgraded to a new version (Sungard OneSolution) on a SQL Server platform. This project is slated for completion in the 1st quarter of 2015.

Stay tuned for more developments as Augusta emphasizes and realizes fiscal transparency!